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TREASON AND ITS TREATMENT.

REMARKS

OF

HON. JOSEPH HOLT,

AT A DINNER IN

CHARLESTON, S. C.,

ON THE EVENING OF THE 14th OF APRIL, 1865,

AFTER THE FLAG RAISING AT FORT SUMTER.

NEW YORK YOUNG MEN'S REPUBLICAN UNION.
1865.

Extract from a letter published in the NEW YORK COMMERCIAL ADVERTISER of April 22nd, 1865.

CHARLESTON, S. C., April 15th.

The Fort Sumter celebration was brought to a close last night by a dinner, given to the Government's guests by General Gillmore at the Charleston House, followed by a ball arranged under the auspices of General Hatch's staff. At the dinner, when the viands had been discussed, we listened to ebullitions of pure patriotism and unfettered sentiment in which Generals Gillmore, Anderson, Doubleday and Townsend, and Messrs. Holt, Kelley, Dougherty, Tilton, Hoxie, Thompson and Garrison took active and eloquent part. By common consent the speech of Judge Holt was adjudged to be a masterpeice of oratory, in its conciseness, felicity of diction, breadth of views, and loyal statesmanship. Its effect was electrical. During its rapid delivery, every eye was fixed on the orator, every ear anxious to catch each uttered word, and as each sentence, faultlessly rounded off, reached its termination, the applause was deafening and prolonged. So far as is known, no full report of Judge Holt's remarks was made at the time, but it is understood that the request for their publication has since been so general and urgent as to lead to the expectation that a copy will be furnished for public perusal. Taking into consideration the circumstance that the dinner was laid and the speeches made in the dining hall of the hotel where nullification, secession and treason have, in their time, had full sway, and where freedom, loyalty and patriotism have been prohibited sentiments, this fit conclusion of the day's ceremonial is worthy of note, as being an added nail in the coffin of rebellion, driven home in the very room where the foul *diablerie* was cradled.

NOTE.—At the urgent solicitation of the NEW YORK YOUNG MEN'S REPUBLICAN UNION, Judge HOLT has permitted the publication of the remarks which were, deservedly, received with such enthusiasm in Charleston. Their more extended circulation, in the present form, cannot but be productive of good throughout the loyal North.

NEW YORK YOUNG MEN'S REPUBLICAN UNION.

1856–1860–1864.

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JUDGE HOLT'S REMARKS.

MAJOR-GENERAL ANDERSON having, in response to a toast, referred to the noble and patriotic manner in which he had been sustained, during his perilous experience in Fort Sumter, by Messrs. HOLT, STANTON and DIX, then members of the Buchanan Cabinet at Washington, Judge HOLT was called upon to reply; when, after an enthusiastic reception, he spoke, in substance, as follows:

LADIES AND GENTLEMEN—

While I am most grateful for the kind words of Major General Anderson, and for the generous reception which has been given to them, I feel little able to speak to you to-night, much as you have encouraged me to do so. As my feet pressed the ruins of Sumter to-day, amid the memories and associations which cluster there, and as I looked out upon its historic surroundings, and upon that magnificent panorama of events which stretches away from its crumbling walls, I experienced emotions too profound for utterance, and was deeply conscious that silence would best express the awe, and wonder, and admiration, and thanksgiving with which I was filled; and so I feel now.

We all thank the President of the United States for that delicate and earnest appreciation of the cravings of the popular heart, which prompted him to order that the flag which four years ago was lowered before an insolent and treacherous foe should, by the hands of the then gallant commander of that fort, be to-day flung to the breeze, saluted and honored by imposing ceremonies on the part of both the land and naval forces of the republic. It was an epoch, truly a proud epoch in our lives, to have been privileged to witness this intensely dramatic and poetic triumph of the symbol of our country's honor and independence. Seen in the light of the gigantic struggle in which the nation has since been engaged, Sumter and its heroic garrison stand transfigured before us, and we realize at once the grandeur of the role they played, and the vastness of the influence which their courage and faithfulness have exerted upon our subsequent history. The cannonades since heard upon more than a hundred fields of battle are but the multiplied echoes of the guns of Sumter, while the brilliant daring, the Spartan fortitude, and the irrepressible enthusiasm which have marked the progress of our conquering army and navy, are but answering pulsations to the sublime spirit that there met and defied the first shock of the rebellion. The wave of war first rolled away from the walls of that fort, and swept on from stronghold to stronghold, and from State to State, ever swelling and surging in its course until, in its gory circuit, it came back to Sumter again, bearing high upon its crest the banner on which we have looked with gladdened eyes to-day; not a star lost, not a glory dimmed—emblematic in its entirety and lustre of the future of our beloved country, as are the blackened and shattered ramparts over which it floated, emblematic of the fortunes of the rebellion, whose death rattle is now heard on the plains of traitorous and desolated Virginia.

I share the satisfaction common to you all that General Anderson, and a part of his command, embracing that loyal and fearless man of God, the then chaplain of Sumter, have been spared to participate in

the rejoicings of to-day, and to be with us to-night. Those august ceremonies derived a new grace and dignity from the presence of these well-tried patriots. There is not a brick or stone in those walls which did not speak to us in their praise, while to my vision that glorious old flag, vindicated and redeemed at last, seemed to flutter in the sunlight the more proudly for having been unfurled by him who had so consecrated it by his valor. Of this true soldier I may speak with confidence, as I shall with pleasure, since I had some personal knowledge of his bearing amid the trying scenes to which the celebration in which you have been engaged so distinctly pointed.

In the world's history it has occasionally happened that wicked statesmen and rulers have made great, and, for themselves, fatal mistakes in the choice of the instruments of their crimes. But of all the blunders of this class which have occurred, probably the most complete, the most disastrous for the plans of him who made it, was that committed by the traitor Floyd, when he selected then Major, now Major-General, Anderson to command the forts of Charleston Harbor. This was the more remarkable since Floyd rarely mistook his men, as is sufficiently shown by his assignment of Twiggs to the Department of Texas, and by other appointments and adjustments of the military service, looking to a lubrication of the machinery of the rebellion, on which I will not pause to comment. Great, too, have been the surprise and terror of these wicked rulers, when they have found their trusted instruments failing in their hands; but perhaps few of these exhibitions have equalled that which was witnessed at Washington when the unfaltering fidelity of Major Anderson and his little command was first fully manifested. When intelligence reached the Capital that by a bold and dexterous movement this command had been transferred from Moultrie to Sumter, and was safe from the disabled guns left behind, the emotions of Floyd were absolutely uncontrollable—emotions of mingled mortification and anguish and rage and panic. His fury seemed that of some baffled fiend, who discovers suddenly opening at his own feet the gulf of ruin which he had been preparing for another. Over all the details of this passionate outburst of a conspirator, caught and entangled in his own toils, the veil of official secrecy still hangs, and it may be that history will never be privileged to transfer this memorable scene to its pages. There is one, however, whose absence to-day we have all deplored, and to whom the nation is grateful for the masterly ability and lion-like courage with which he has fought this rebellion in all the vicissitudes of its career—your Secretary of War—who, were he here, could bear testimony to the truthfulness of my words. He looked upon that scene, and the country needs not now to be told that he looked upon it with scorn and defiance. (*Here the audience, rising to their feet, gave three cheers for Secretary Stanton.*)

With all that the garrison at Sumter endured you must be familiar. Uncheered, beleagured, without provisions or adequate munitions of war, taunted and threatened by day and by night, they were compelled to witness from hour to hour the construction of a girdle of batteries, slowly rising and pointing their guns on the fort, without the authority on the part of its brave inmates to lift a hand to resent these insults or to resist these deliberate and formidable preparations for their destruction. When, however, the conflict came, and the blood of this handful of soldiers was demanded as a cement for the Southern Confederacy, then the country sprang like a giant from its lethargy, and was at once filled with impulses and purposes as grand as they were irrepressible.

But while the nation rushed almost *en masse* to meet the enemy, it must be confessed that it did so with but dim and imperfect perceptions of the field of duty that was opening before it. When, however, the progress of events unmasked the true character of the rebellion and laid bare in all their ghastliness its inherent barbarisms and atrocities, as well as its ultimate aims, gradually at first, but rapidly at last, light was poured upon the national mind and conscience, as the timid dawn kindles blazingly into day; and now, the whole land, in council and in the field, has, as under a resistless inspiration from on high, seized the clanking fetter of the slave, and the bloody lash of his driver and has flung them scornfully full into the face of the rebellion.

In answer to the graceful and generous compliment of our friend Major General Anderson, permit me to say, that from the first moment this conspiracy disclosed its cloven foot in the Capital until now, I have never doubted of my own duty, and had the entire race of man confronted me on the question, my convictions in regard to that duty would not have been the less complete. Nor did I ever doubt of the final success of the Government in putting the accursed rebellion under its feet—though I knew not how long we might be fated to toil, to suffer, to bleed, and to die on field of battle and in the loathsome prisons of the South; still the assurance has never forsaken me, that sooner or later, when purged of our national sins, we would be accepted of Him, in whose hands are the issues of all our plans and of all our yearnings. For weary months and years His face seemed hidden from us, and though the land was furrowed with graves, our standard stood still. But now that, under the leadership of your true-hearted Chief Magistrate, the country has made a sincere and earnest endeavor to purify itself from this great transgression against the cause of human freedom, the cloud has been dissipated, and that face, so long hidden, is looking down upon us, through the startling events of the last few weeks, with a smile in its brightness, above the sun shining in his strength. In these events, so entrancing for us all, and in those which must rapidly follow, may be found proof, well nigh conclusive, that the republic which was born on the 4th day of July, 1776, was born not for death, but for immortality, and that though its bosom may be scarred by the poignards of conspirators, and though its blood may be required to flow on many fields, yet that neither the swords nor the bayonets of traitors can ever reach the seat of its great and exhaustless life.*

While in these events there is ground for boundless gratitude to the Father of us all, and to our unconquerable armies and navy, there is also ground for boundless rejoicing and exultation. We exult in no unhallowed or merciless spirit. Before Him who sitteth on the circle of eternity we bow our heads in adoring thankfulness, for these proofs that he still rules among the children of men, and that we are still the people of his care; but before the world we exult and shout aloud for joy—joy with a thousand tongues and a thousand songs—that this rebellion with all its crimes, with all its fetid and pustulous baseness, is at length being trodden down—down to the hell from which it came. We accept this as evidence that the demon of all evil seen in the apocalyptic vision in chains, has not yet broken his fetters, and the ruined fortresses and devastated cities of the rebellion, its palaces and homes in ashes, its people exhausted and impoverished, we hail these

* It is a noteworthy coincidence that President Lincoln's assassination occurred on the evening, and almost within the hour, during which Judge Holt was speaking at the Charleston House

as the footprints of Him who dwelleth among the seraphim, and who hath said: "Vengeance is mine and I will repay." Woe to that people who, under the promptings of a charitable humanity shall presumptuously throw themselves between that vengeance and its victims.

Victory is often attended with dangers for the victors, quite as great as those that marked the battle, though of a totally different character. The crisis which the American people are now approaching cannot fail to present these dangers as belonging to those all-absorbing questions which must arise on the overthrow and dispersion of the rebel armies. The triumph which is being achieved by the republic is not one of mere material forces, but it is the triumph of truth, of justice, of honor, of loyalty, of freedom, and of civilization itself, and the very airs which kiss our flag are luminous with the moral glories which are inseparable from these victories. From every church and praying household, aye, and from every devout heart in the land, a continual prayer should go up that the fruits of this prolonged and sanguinary conflict may not be suffered to perish and that nothing may be done to abate the moral grandeur of the sacrifices which have been made, or to fling contempt upon the memories of those martyred armies which have so nobly died that liberty might live. But if the work is to pause while treason is only scotched, not killed; if the knife is to be stayed while there remains a single root of that cancer of slavery which has been eating into the national vitals, then in vain shall we have expended thousands of millions of treasure, and in vain will the country have offered on the red altars of war the bravest of its sons. It is the duty of the Government, not by words, for they are already found in our Constitution and laws, but it is its duty by stern and implacable action to stamp upon this monstrous crime against our national life, and upon the parricides who have committed it, the brand of an undying infamy—an infamy so black and loathsome that the generation to which we belong shall shrink from it with horror, and those which are to follow us will recall it with a shudder. Let us beware, lest, under the impulses of a miscalled magnanimity, we impiously assume to be wiser than God in claiming that crime can be repressed without punishment.

Let it then be our fond and solemn trust that the Government will maintain to the end the position which it has occupied from the beginning—that this is, in very deed, a war upon crime and criminals—criminals with whom we cannot fraternize, with whom we can make no compromises, without, in the judgment of mankind, and at the bar of history, becoming criminals ourselves; without giving an absolute respectability and a new growth to the sentiment of treason in the South, and turning loose in these distracted States a band of unwhipped malefactors, with their hands filled with the seeds of another rebellion, to be by them scattered and planted at their will. As for the masses, the ignorant, deluded masses, who have blindly followed the standard of this revolt, let there be full and free pardon, if you will, on their sincere return to their allegiance; though it does seem to me that it would be but decent to allow these thrice guilty rebels a little time in which to wash the blood of our brothers from their hands before we hasten to offer them our own. But as for the original conspirators and leaders who, through long years in the Capital, in the cabinet, and in the army too, deliberately prepared this rebellion; who, without the pretense of wrong or provocation, traitorously set it on foot; who have pressed it forward wit all the malignity of fiends, and with all the cowardly, revolting cruelty of savages; who, through

perjury, and rapine and arson, and butchery, have made our once happy country one great house of mourning, and from whose skirts, in the sight of the Eternal, there is now dripping the blood of near half a million of our people—for these miscreants, the Iscariots of the human race, may God in His eternal justice, forbid that there should ever be shown mercy or forbearance.

You must well remember that while Sumter was besieged, and daily threatened with bombardment, rebel commissioners went up from this city—the political Sodom from which all our sorrows have come—to Washington. They were sent to announce to the Government of the United States the terms on which it could have peace with the slave aristocracy of the South, and they went with all the *hau'eur* and insolence of the Roman ambassadors of old, who claimed to carry the destinies of nations in the folds of their robes. It was a long and weary time before your excellent President was able to organize a commission responsive to this. Great was his embarrassment in finding the right men, and, when found, great was his embarrassment still in getting them into the right places. At length, however, he succeeded in constituting the commission, and for a good while these peace commissioners, with all necessary credentials, and plenary powers, have in a most becoming manner and with entire success been treating with the public enemy throughout the South. Though these commissioners are well known to you, it may not be invidious or improper for me to name a part of them. They are Grant and Sherman, and Sheridan, and Farragut, and our noble host who sits to my right, Major-Gen. Gillmore—God bless him—and a long line of illustrious commanders, who, on many hard-fought fields, and in "the imminent deadly breach," have displayed those lofty qualities of courage and incorruptible loyalty, which must crown this generation of our people with an imperishable halo. More unselfish, more patriotic commissioners never set out in pursuit of a nation's peace. Rest assured that the work which they are doing will be well done. The peace which they shall make will not be a wretched hollow truce, patched up between cowards on the one hand and traitors on the other, and which, based on the shattered fragments of our dismembered country, would be broken by the first whipped slave, who, escaping from his master, should seek an asylum on the soil of the free. No, the peace they are conquering will be negotiated on the field of battle amid the triumph of our arms, and with the Stars and Stripes streaming as a meteor over the head of the commissioners. Such a peace, and such only, will endure, because it will rest, not on the perfidious promises of red handed conspirators, but on the broken swords and dismantled fortresses of the rebellion.

Such a peace as must follow from the overthrow of the military power of the rebellion being secured, the obligation will then press upon the nation, not only to strike the last fetter from the limbs of the last slave, but also to see that guarantees are created against the re-establishment of slavery, through some cunningly devised system of tutelage, which, enforced by state law, would entail upon this oppressed race the same ignorance, and poverty, and social, and political disfranchisement to which they have heretofore been subjected. That the lingering sentiment of disloyalty in the South, added to ancient prejudices, and to the treacherous and savage instincts known to be inspired by this institution, will, under a changed nomenclature, seek to accomplish this result, can scarcely be doubted. Upon the solution of this momentous question of reconstruction, the American people can well afford to wait, and

it is their duty to wait, lest by precipitation false steps should be taken which could never be retrieved. There should be the utmost patience and circumspection, but no haste. The country wants no more traitors in the Capitol, and no more State governments into whose organizations the spirit of treason has been breathed. If a loyal population cannot be found to put the machinery of State government into operation, then let us wait and see if the next will not be a wiser and better generation. In the meanwhile, let these former States be subjected to military rule. They constitute part and parcel of the territory of the republic, and no apology is to be made for holding them and governing them as such. While the ballot box is the rightful source of authority over loyal men, the legitimate and reliable foundation for the authority of the Government over traitors, is the sword.

With peace restored, and with the duties it must impose performed, upward towards Him who, from the councils of eternity, hath declared that "the laborer is worthy of his hire," we may turn our eyes, and in humble confidence invoke his blessing; because through carnage and sacrifices of every kind we shall at last have had the courage to do unto others as we would have them do unto us, and shall have lifted up to the high plane of our own christian civilization and political rights millions of human beings on whom the wrongs and sorrows of centuries have been pressing. Then, too, we will be able to look the nations of the earth in the face without a blush, because we shall have faithfully acquitted ourselves of the solemn trust that humanity has committed to our hands, and by restoring the republic, in despite of all the power and crimes of the enemies within its bosom, we will have afforded a demonstration of the capacity of our race for self-government, transcending far in its impressiveness even that furnished by our fathers in founding our institutions. On the issue of this struggle has been staked, as I verily believe, the concentrated fruits of the battles for free government in all ages and climes of the world, and we shall have preserved them; and this extended land, which, in its soil and climate, in its rivers and lakes and mountain ranges, seems to have been fashioned by the hand of the Almighty as a temporal paradise for his people, we shall proudly present to the nations of the earth as no longer disfigured and degraded by the mockery of institutions which, while claiming to be free, rest their foundation on the enormities and spoils of servitude. And then, both on land and ocean, and upward to the sky, our national anthem will rise, mounting higher and higher, and swelling grander and grander, and growing yet wilder and wilder in its exultant strains, because for the first time in our national history, these strains will be unmingled with the moan of human bondage.

And then, my countrymen, with your starry banner undimmed and untorn, and floating on every breeze from Maine to the Gulf, and from the Atlantic to the Sierra Nevada and the shores of the Pacific, the republic, redeemed from this cankering curse of slavery and from the machinations of its conspirators, regenerated and purified by the struggle through which it has passed, and ennobled by a sense of duty performed, will rebound from the blow it has received, and will enter upon a career of prosperity, of freedom, of national greatness, so vast, so far reaching, that in the distant centuries to come, amid the grandeur of its power and the unclouded splendors of its renown, even this mighty conflict, with all its agonies and its triumphs may be forgotten, or if recalled, only as a dim and almost unremembered event in the sublime history of the past.

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